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# THE TWILIGHT OF AN EMPIRE

By Felix Morley

With little understanding of what is at stake, the American people are at this moment confronting a political decision more momentous than any presented to them since 1776. Then the choice made was to separate from the British Empire and to establish a unique Republic. Now the question is whether that Republic shall be maintained or whether it shall in turn become an empire by assuming responsibility for dependencies which Great Britain can no longer control.

When the American colonists took steps which made the Declaration of Independence inevitable they did not at first admit, and in many cases did not realize, the implications of their acts. Similarly, few now foresee that the consequences of current actions can automatically give rise to fundamental changes in our system of government. The outcome of "measures short of war," however, should at least remind us that political assurances are frequently employed to conceal political realities. It is a reality attested by all history that if a republic assumes imperial functions it will not remain a republic.

But that reality is less obvious, less immediate and less insistent than the appalling fact that the British Empire is now moving slowly toward dissolution, partly because of centrifugal force affecting its dependencies but even more because the heart has lost its vigor. Physical dissolution is always tragic, and when it proceeds on an imperial scale the pathos is proportionate. Nevertheless, if political science is to make any contribution at such a moment, it must be one in which the power of thought is wholly untrammeled by emotion.

When the eventual post-mortem of the British Empire is written, by scholars not yet born, a complex of social, economic and political disorders will be analyzed. The proximate cause, however, is already obvious. This small and naturally unfavored island could achieve and hold world influence only by maintaining a balance of power in a stable European State system. The destruction of Europe, or the rise of powerful non-European nations antagonistic to each other, would in either case automatically reduce Great Britain to inferior political status. If the malignant developments should produce enduring monetary instabil-

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ity, the fate of Britain's heterogeneous empire would be sealed.

It is now all too clear that events since 1914 have doomed that remarkable political agglomeration proudly called "the empire on which the sun never sets." The basic conditions of its survival no longer exist. Simultaneously the United States and Russia, both relatively self-contained, have gained enormously in strength, in political aggressiveness, and most of all in mutual distrust.

II

The British people, weary and overburdened, no longer able to stand alone, must soon align themselves with one or the other of the two dominant nations.

Yet Britain, in many respects, is now a liability and not an asset. And there are reservations, perhaps as many in Moscow as in Washington, to assuming the disagreeable role of referee in bankruptcy. The State is a cold-blooded instrumentality of power. Always, when strong enough, it dictates terms. On what terms, then, will either Russia or the United States be willing to bail Great Britain out?

The answer is fairly simple in the case of Russia. Its government is probably less interested in the mere acquisition of foreign territory than is our own. The Soviet objective, confusing to those Americans who think only in terms of physical possessions, is to spread an idea -- the doctrine of communism. If Britain will go all out for socialism, which merges imperceptibly into communism, its people may, with the Kremlin's blessing, retain their flag, their king, their ceremonial and as much of the Empire as can be controlled by a communized House of Commons. To dominate that organ, where British sovereignty rests, would be much smarter from the Russian viewpoint than to take over outlying colonies and dependencies.

Like Russia, the United States also represents a political idea, and one which is fundamentally opposed to communism. This idea is that the individual is important for himself; that self-government is far more desirable than political government; that the State is merely a policing agency, from its nature dangerous to liberty and therefore always to be restricted.

Unquestionably the American idea has been greatly weakened by the impact of socialism. Indeed, the outstanding political characteristic of the Roosevelt regime was its repudiation of the native American tradition and its imitative approach to Marxist philosophy. Naturally the Communists and fellow travellers exploited this golden opportunity to undermine the citadel of capitalistic strength.

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This effort has failed, and the failure has a distinct bearing on the situation produced by the decline of the British Empire. For if the United States takes over British dependencies, in Greece or elsewhere, the move will be far more bitterly resented by Russia than if the British stayed there unaided. The Kremlin can be hopeful about British socialism, as it was about the New Deal. But there is no hope at all -- as Stalin sees it -- in a government controlled by a coalition of capitalistic Republicans and Jeffersonian Democrats. Such a regime will make every endeavor to restore that private enterprise which Communists have organized to destroy.

III

The British position, in political thinking, is about midway between that of Russia and that now dominant in the United States. On the one hand the English still cling to the traditional safeguards of liberty -- such as free speech, free press, trial by jury and right of association. But Britain has gone so far in glorification of government as such, that the rights of the Englishman as an individual have become more nominal than real. He can speak his mind in Hyde Park, but cannot engage in any occupation which the bureaucracy declares to be "non-essential."

The growing threat to liberty in Great Britain is the more real because the British "subject" -- a word in which he sees no indignity -- possesses no inviolable Constitutional guarantees. Every law passed by Parliament has equal Constitutional force and, unlike the United States, the minority therefore has no rights which the majority is bound to respect. Since the legislative power of the House of Lords was undermined there has been no question that Britain, politically speaking, is more democratic than the United States. But there is also no question that unrestricted majority rule can under pressure of circumstance pass quickly over into tyranny.

In short, it is as likely that Great Britain will move on from State socialism to communism as that it will swing backwards to free enterprise. The advance of collectivism is hastening the liquidation of an Empire which was sustained by private trade. And the liquidation of empire will in turn tend to strengthen collectivism in the British Isles because, when the choice is narrowed to liberty or life, most men of every nationality will choose the latter.

IV

So it is gross over-simplification to say that the extremely difficult decision now confronting the United States admits of but one

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answer. Obviously it will assist the British Government, and perhaps indirectly the British people, to finance its commitments in Greece. Equally obviously this step will increase the tensions, and consequently the risk of eventual hostilities, between our country and Russia.

There are other ways in which assumption of British burdens by the United States could prove disastrous. Already the military occupation of conquered territory, and minimum relief to starving people, is intensifying inflationary trends and threatening any effective debt or tax reduction. Already our overseas commitments provide a strong argument for that permanent military conscription which we significantly hesitate to call by its true name.

It requires no gift of prophecy to realize that if the United States increases its foreign political commitments, assuming imperial burdens as the British lay them down, the result will be to change our Federal Republic into a strongly-centralized empire. The Constitution has proved amazingly elastic. But it will not stretch far enough to serve a modern Rome. The implied increase of governmental functions, coming on top of those already accepted as inevitable, could easily spell the end of the Republic.

Yet the other alternative is no less disturbing. To abandon the Eastern Mediterranean to Russia would mean, in time, the surrender of Italy, then France, then Spain, to Communist control. Independent of the outcome in Germany, that sequence would mean a Communist Britain, merging much of its former empire with that of Russia. And then the dangers assumed in the case of Hitler would be realities.

After doing nothing to avert it, the United States drifted into the last war. We fought that war on a vindictive policy of "unconditional surrender" of which the utter bankruptcy is now apparent to all. We framed the United Nations in such a manner as to give Russia the means, most skillfully used, to make that organization far less effective than the old League. Nearly two years after the close of hostilities in Europe we have not been able to conclude a single peace treaty.

As the sun sinks slowly on the British Empire it would seem time for the American people to ask themselves, very seriously, whether their leadership in the last ten years has been sufficiently forthright or sufficiently intelligent to encourage trust and confidence now.

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events VOL. IV, NO. 10

By Frank C. Hanighen March 5, 1947

Members of the Hoover mission to Germany tell an illuminating anecdote. In Berlin, they propounded the following question to experts on the American Army staff: "How many inspectors would be necessary to watch for signs of German rearmament in case German industry were restored to pre-war normal?" The answer was: "Twenty." If there were any doubts among Mr. Hoover's associates about the safety of allowing German industry to recover, they were well dissipated by this authoritative reply. The story is additionally significant because it shows how the Hoover party went straight to the core of the German problem.

The first report, made public last week, was widely and justly praised. But it is not generally realized that two more will follow: One on Austria; and another -- by far the most important of all -- on the general economic situation in Germany and the remedies indicated. The latter is expected to call for a sharp scaling upward of the level-of-industry agreement. Because that offshoot of Potsdam, which throttled down industrial output to a disastrous level, has been the basic principle of the Morgenthau plan, it will be interesting to watch the reactions among elements still favoring the ideas of the former Secretary of the Treasury.

There is some expectation that the rest of the Hoover recommendations will gain general assent in this country, since one highly important point made in the first report received little unfavorable American comment. That point was the Hoover proposal that all food shipments to Germany be paid for before reparations. It is no secret among experts on German economy that Germany, after paying for such food, will be unable to shoulder any further financial burdens. Therefore, it is unlikely that Russia -- and probably France as well -- will agree to this proposal for placing reparations in a secondary status, without considerable argument. Hoover has obviously presented the Moscow Conference with a very thorny question, no matter how solid American support for his ideas.

There is general applause for Hoover's suggestion that some 75 Liberty ships be manned by German sailors to transport food to Germany. Since the confiscation of the German merchant marine under the Potsdam Declaration, an estimated 30,000 German sailors, some of the finest sea-faring men in the world, have been idle in northern Germany -- a deplorable waste of manpower in the present maritime situation. Another constructive suggestion is to allot fishing ships to Germany in order to supplement the food supply. Fish would provide one element -- protein -- sadly lacking in the present diet.

Members of the mission returned with many expressions of concern about a development rarely mentioned in discussions of the German problem. In Eastern Germany (and also in Austria), they found that the Russians had taken as reparations the title to many factories now operating under Communist management. Even if Russian troops are all withdrawn from Europe, Moscow thus retains powerful enclaves in the West. These Russian-owned plants will send their industrial products eastward regardless of the necessities of the German and Austrian economies. They will also serve as stations for espionage and political agitation. It will be surprising if this matter is not aired before long.

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The White House conference which sat in council on the British note about Greece is believed to have entertained a British suggestion that the United States assume the role of supporter of Turkey. Ankara reportedly served notice on Washington that it could not promise to withstand Russian pressure without American aid.

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Since President Truman consented in principle to financial assistance for British occupation of Greece, Congressional circles -- confused and worried by these reports -- are of the opinion that the President should make known to the American people, honestly and fully, exactly what commitments he has made and wishes to make.

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Foreign Minister Bevin may or may not have been factually correct in claiming that Truman's statements on Palestine had broken up imminent agreement between Jews and Arabs. But the attacks on the British statesman for suggesting that Truman made his pro-Zionist statements with an eye to last November's elections seem ridiculously hypocritical. Members of Congress, public figures, editorial writers, etc., developed an impressive degree of righteous indignation. Many of those who spoke or wrote thus must have had their tongues lodged firmly in their cheeks. After all, the relation between Presidential statements on Palestine and votes in New York State have hardly been a mystery to anyone who takes an interest in politics. But politics produces its wonders. We noted among these choristers of outraged virtue the name of one particular Member of Congress. And we recall how that very same gentleman privately in our presence just a year ago cackled with artless glee about his party's plan to exploit Palestine for votes.

The Washington Evening Star (February 28) talked sense: "The fact remains that the [Truman] statement was issued at the height of the elections in pivotal New York, where the vote of the Jews is of great importance. The fact remains, too, that it was issued in face of a British plea that its issuance at that moment would be harmful to Anglo-Arab-Jewish negotiations. On the face of things, therefore, there was a strong suggestion of domestic politics in it, and many newspapers in this country, including the Star, said so at the time."

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One of the less creditable exploits of the press during the past week was the treatment of the sensational story about a "Nazi underground." When American and British troops arrested a number of former S.S. and S.A. officers, the story was widely headlined as a "movement to restore German might." Careful readers, however, could not fail to note that this claim began to fade after a few paragraphs, when it was explained, "Army investigators . . . indicated that evidence of a movement might be uncovered by the interrogation of persons involved." Also it appeared that, according to the official communique, "the main target last night was a rather nebulous movement which has been under observation for some time." Since the raid, the Army has made public no evidence that there is such a "movement."

Washington observers were mystified as to why a "rather nebulous movement" should receive such dramatic publicity. Some wondered if pro-Soviet elements in the British and American regimes had helped to stage the incident just before the Moscow Conference. Soviet propaganda likes to play up such alleged reports so as to fortify the Russian bargaining position. Others, however, are inclined to believe the whole matter was fortuitous. News from the Continent has been dull for some weeks and those editors who seek sensational copy could hardly resist such an opportunity.

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There are persistent rumors that a junta is forming to bring about a revolution in Cuba. Whether or not former President Batista, now a resident of Florida, has become a member of the junta is not known. But it is claimed that a considerable sum of money has been gathered and those who are in a position to know say that arms have been purchased in Europe. Responsible observers are inclined to discount much -- but not all -- of this talk. They believe that both in Cuba and abroad, where exiles gather, somewhat serious opposition to President Grau San Martin is taking shape. The Cuban President, it is noted, faces increasing and widespread criticism on the

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score of weakness towards the formidable Cuban Communist movement. Additionally, Cuban planters and refiners are discontented with his sugar and financial policy.

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Briefs ---- Mr. Henry Luce reportedly wants to launch a campaign against Secretary of State Marshall. The publisher, born in China of missionary parents, has a long-standing friendliness for the Chiang Kai-shek regime and is said to have been aroused to indignation by Marshall's famous farewell letter, issued as he departed from China, and containing severe criticisms of the Nationalist Government. Mr. Luce is said to be also concerned about the close relations between Marshall and John Carter Vincent, the State Department's foremost critic of Chiang's Government. The publisher's increasing interest in Far Eastern opposition to Soviet expansionism is seen in the fact that he, together with Mr. Winthrop Aldrich, gave a dinner last week for Dr. Synghman Rhee, anti-Communist Korean leader.

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Mr. R. R. Young, now bestriding the railway industry, has cast his eyes on a new world to conquer -- Hollywood. Those who know Mr. Young well, say that the C and O President would like to "shake up" the movie industry. As a beginning, he has gained control of a few minor American companies and made a deal with J. Arthur Rank, British film magnate.

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The actual influence of Governor Dewey in the Washington scene is becoming evident. It is said that favors asked and requests for Congressional action originating in Republican circles on the Pacific Coast and in the Mountain States go to Albany first, then are forwarded to Dewey friends in the House and Senate. Applicants reportedly express satisfaction with the way their requests are handled.

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The Lilienthal affair has generated much heat, steam and smoke, but little light. By this time, the charge (see NMG, February 19, 1947) that efforts to block the former TVA head constitute a plot by the Power Trust seems to have broken down. Nor can the opposition be described as a conspiracy by the "old isolationist crowd," in view of the fact that such confirmed interventionists as Bridges (N.H.) and Byrd (Va.) are out against Lilienthal. Indeed, debunking of both pro and con has gone so far that there has even appeared a defense of the presumably indefensible Senator McKellar. It is noted that Lilienthal himself denied during the hearings that the Tennessee Senator had ever sought patronage jobs in TVA. And even McKellar would doubtless concede that Lilienthal made a generous gesture to solve the conflict by offering to withdraw. Whatever else the controversy has proved, it is clear that such parliamentary struggles breed profuse mythologies -- Right and Left.

Whether or not Lilienthal is confirmed, Taft has again sustained his reputation for political courage. It is being said that the Ohioan has definitely thrown away his chances for 1948 by his stand. But that was also said when Taft last fall criticized the Nuremberg trials. Yet the Taft stock soared in December and January. If Taft loses as a result of this affair, it will be because he failed to come out early and make it his fight rather than McKellar's.

The pro-Lilienthal barrage in the press and in the Congressional mail has a distinctly "organizational" flavor, reminiscent of the pro-OPA drive of last summer. Nevertheless, conservative Members of Congress should recognize its political force and cleverness. Truman was playing politics when he named Lilienthal. It is no inconsiderable feat to succeed not only in obscuring this fact, but in representing the opposition to Lilienthal as "playing politics." Although a conservative trend now predominates, conservatives have obviously -- judging by this affair -- failed to make their ideas acceptable among one powerful group in the country: composed of the "intelligentsia," the preachers, the teachers, the women's clubs, etc., which is obviously the most vocal force supporting Lilienthal.

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# Notes and Quotes

From a Europe so largely given over to Socialist and Communist regimes, it is reassuring to hear a voice proclaiming the old tenets of individualism. Dr. Trygve J. B. Hoff, editor of the Norwegian journal Farmand, tilts vigorously against the Norwegian Labor Government (which is launched on a course of planned economy and socialism) and lists some "claims to an existence worthy of human beings":

"Spiritual freedom. The group comprising scientists, artists and those who write for publication is comparatively small, but this group at any rate considers censorship intolerable. The deprivation of spiritual freedom entails graver consequences. Science and art stagnate in countries where they are directed by the state, and a real democracy cannot exist if there is no facility for opposition and no freedom of the press. . . .

"Consumers' free choice. If production is not to be adjusted in accordance with the taste and needs of the consumer, the latter receives in reality the same treatment as the inmates of asylums and prisons, and that is not an existence worthy of human beings.

"Free choice of occupation and work-place. The opposite is slavery and serfdom and that is no existence worthy of man. . . .

"The state exists for the benefit of the individual and not vice versa. This is a fundamental claim which covers all the others. The fine watchwords: 'The common weal before self-seeking,' 'The community before the individual' and others derived from the Nazi 'Gemeinnutz vor Eigennutz' are false formulas calculated to justify the abuse and exploitation of the people by a single powerful group. These watchwords are only pretexts to deprive the individual of his rights and his liberty. The whole history of Europe shows that freedom consists in the rights of the individual: the right of the individual to elect spokesmen, freedom of religion, political freedom and economic freedom. In all cases the rights of the individual -- not those of the majority. The rights of the individual against the organized community and the state."

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"The basic cause for the present plight of the teaching profession" is discussed by Congressman Howard Buffett (Nebr.) in his February 26 Washington Report, a regular feature issued for the benefit of constituents. "Teacher pay schedules have not kept in step with pay rates. The decisive cause is that the national government has been seizing a much larger share of the tax dollar than ever before. Twenty years ago the Federal Government took 27 per cent of the tax dollar. Local governments, of which probably the biggest item is schools, got 56 per cent of all taxes levied. But in 1946 the local governments received only 13 per cent of all tax collections. The national government had increased its grab on the tax dollar from 27 per cent in 1927 to 74 per cent of all taxes paid in 1946."

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Professor Arnold J. Toynbee, author of A Study of History, is now delivering a series of lectures at Bryn Mawr College. A press conference brought the following warning from the greatest of living historians - as reported by PM, March 2: "Attempts at a world state are, historically, a very ancient and very disastrous idea. . . . If our current civilization follows the usual grooves, a world state is the grimmest of prospects. 'Rome and ancient China came to that end -- a single empire -- but at great cost and destruction. Hitler offered it to us again, and we paid a great deal not to have it. . . . The UN is an attempt at an alternative to a Holy Roman Empire.'"



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